

Structure of a Session

Structure of a Therapy Session

- Perhaps the most distinctive element in CBT
- Almost all sessions other than *Initial Intake* and *Termination* follow the blue print outlined in this lecture

Theoretical Rationale

- Typifies the structured nature of CBT as developed primarily by Beck and represented by the many manualized, evidence-based treatments
 - CBT is goal-oriented and active
 - CBT is a collaboration between therapist and patient
 - Most effective when patient is oriented to the structure early in treatment
 - Facilitates the teaching of skills a client will learn in the course of treatment

Empirical Evidence

- Studies of therapy process in CBT assessing integrity and adherence show that structuring a session is associated with treatment success
- Good structure = good CBT competency
- “Concrete” elements of CBT associated with early symptom relief (Feeley et al., 1999)

Components of a Session

1. Orient the patient to the structure of the session
2. Check in
3. Set the agenda
4. Give periodic summaries
5. Assign homework
6. Summarize the session and ask for feedback

Orient the Patient

Set the tone

“Let’s start with a brief check in: I want to hear about how you’re feeling and how your week went and to take a look at your measures. Then let’s set an agenda: one thing we want to be sure to put on the agenda is to review your homework from last time...”

Check In

Inquire about:

1. Any significant events since last time
2. Current mood (subjective)
3. Objective measures complete
4. Significant discrepancies
5. Significant changes

Check In

- Limit the check in to 5 - 10 minutes
- If a significant event has happened, propose it gets added to the agenda and addressed in good time
- A time to chit chat and express warmth and to build the alliance
- Important that the therapist maintain a distinction between check in time and the rest of the session (WHY???)

Set the Agenda

- Short list of topics that therapist and patient agree to make the focus of that session
- Can include new topics, continuation of previous topics
- Usually, homework for the coming week is not on the Agenda
 - Rather, time for homework is set aside at the end of the session

Set the Agenda

- Initially, therapist will be more active in setting the agenda
- Later in therapy, patient takes on this responsibility as he/she learns to do so
- Asking a simple, direct question: *"What would you like to put on the agenda for your therapy session today?"*
- If needed: *"I suggest we follow up on the work we did last time with your _____ problems. Can we put that on our agenda for today?"*

Set the Agenda

1. Work Collaboratively
 - Say: "Let's make an agenda for our session today."
2. Prioritize agenda items
3. Always review homework
 - Excellent Item #1 in most cases
4. Be realistic about what can be accomplished
5. Keep treatment goals in mind when setting agenda items

Review Homework

- Not reviewing homework you have assigned will encourage non-compliance in the future
- Homework review can be brief or take the rest of the session
- Discussion can include:
 1. What was learned in the homework?
 2. What problems arose, and if so?
 3. How might those problems be solved in the future?

Work the Agenda

- The heart of the CBT session
- Therapist works to infuse elements of CBT (e.g., *activity scheduling, Thought Record, Schema Work*) to address items on the Agenda
- Therapist is responsible for time management
- The Periodic Summary can be an useful tool in time management

Work the Agenda

Threats to Time Management

- Story-telling patients who get bogged down in the details
- Ranting patients who wish to use therapy as a venting opportunity

What do you do about these situations??

Give Periodic Summaries

- Summary after Agenda Setting clarifies what the session will cover
- Summaries during the session provides a review of what has been covered and what is coming next
- Helps therapist and patient stay on the same page
- A place to work out disagreements
- Can help strengthen collaboration/alliance

Assign Homework

Guidelines for Making Homework a Success

- Work Collaboratively
- Be Specific and Concrete
- Tie the assignments to the work in session (and thereby to the treatment goals)
- Anticipate obstacles

Successful Homework

Work Collaboratively

- Make sure both understand rationale for the homework assignment
- When patient does not believe the assignment is important, it may not happen
- Whenever possible, ask patient to assign homework

Successful Homework

Be Specific and Concrete

- ... lest the patient gets confused
- Include details about when, where, with whom, for how long, and with what materials
- Leave enough time to work out these details in your session
- Be creative developing logging/recording forms
 - Index card in cigarette pack wrapper

Successful Homework

Tie Homework to Work done that Session

- Builds upon the work of that session
- Explain how homework relates to the current session's work
- Have an idea about homework at the outset, but do not ignore material from the session that screams do me for homework!
- Do not assign a task for homework something the patient could not do in session!

Successful Homework

Anticipate Obstacles

- One way is to ask directly: *"Do you see any obstacles that would make it hard for you to carry out the assignment?"*
- When patient proposes an assignment that seems impractical, use Socratic questioning to probe the issue together
- Or, role-play the assignment in session if therapist has non-concrete misgivings

Successful Homework

Anticipate Obstacles

- Inquire as to whether there are automatic thoughts that would impede homework compliance: *"What thoughts might you have that would block you from completing this assignment?"*
- Engage in cognitive restructuring then and there
- Phrase the assignment in concrete, behavioral terms

Summarize Session

- Offer a summary of what happened during the session
- Summary can be brief and follow a timeline of the session
- Get patient feedback
 - Can you give me some feedback about our session today?
 - Was there anything that was particularly helpful or anything that was a waste of time?
 - Was there anything I did or said that rubbed you the wrong way?
